



## August 2019 Newsletter

Welcome to the Friends of San Antonio Natural Areas (FOSANA) e-newsletter! We share natural areas news, the Friends' efforts, and opportunities to get involved in volunteering or educational programs at San Antonio's natural areas parks. Please check our website, [www.fosana.org](http://www.fosana.org), for periodic updates and program information.

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### **Prickly Pear-the State Plant of Texas.**

Prickly pear is the common name of a true cactus of which there are almost 60 species. The mature fruit is called a tuna. The name cactus or (the family Cactaceae) comes from the Greek word kaktos, meaning prickly plant. With a single exception, species of the family Cactaceae are found only on North and South American continents. The Prickly Pear is extremely hardy and survives in areas where rainfall can be as much as 50 or as little as 8 inches per year. The spines are actually leaves that first appear as small fleshy structures but harden to spines. The green, fleshy pads are the stems that can carry on photosynthesis. The flowers are characterized by many parts, particularly by petals and sepals. The fruit is succulent. The Prickly Pear reproduces by seeds and fallen pads. Because of this, sometimes it can be a nuisance and even invasive but it is also an important part of our ecosystem. Most people know the Bluebonnet as the State Flower of Texas but few know that in 1995, the Prickly Pear was named the State Plant of Texas.

For thousands of years, along with pecans and buffalo, prickly pear was one of the wild species most consumed by Native Americans. All parts of the plants are said to be high in Calcium, Vitamin B, C, magnesium, iron and are a good source of fiber. Nonetheless, utilizing the plant must be done with caution. Most of us are familiar with the thorny pads and fruits of the prickly pear. These ample defenses manifest in two types of spines, heavy thorns and hair-like clusters called glochids. When the spines and glochids are removed the pads can be eaten while the entire "skin" of the tuna must be removed to be eaten. An early historic record reveals a cautionary tale. A member of La Salle's expedition to Texas in the late 17th century died after ingesting the glochids. His throat became swollen from the irritation and he slowly suffocated. However when the spines are carefully singed or abraded away or peeled off, the pads and tuna can be enjoyed, usually cooked but sometimes raw. Immature pads are called nopalitos. Mature pads are called nopales, and they are [high in fiber, antioxidants and carotenoids](#). They may also have benefits as an anti-inflammatory, and may lower blood sugar in people with type 2 diabetes. The sweet, ripe tunas can be peeled and eaten raw or made into jams.

In addition to being edible, the Prickly Pear has many other uses, from utensils to a binding material for adobe. It is said to have been used as a poultice, to have antiseptic properties and been associated with healing burns, diabetes and eliminating 'bad' cholesterol, among other ailments. Even the pest of the prickly pear, the Cochineal, is useful as fabric dye. In grassland and shrubland ecosystems, prickly pear species also provide shelter and sustenance for many species of small animals, birds and mammals. Legend has it that in hard times the coyote brushes the spines off of tunas with its tail before it eats them. Likewise, ranchers are known to burn spines off of Prickly Pear to make prickly pear pads edible to cattle.

Given the history of Texas as a frontier landscape with dramatic and majestic features, it seems appropriate for the State Plant of Texas to be simultaneously hardy and beautiful.



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## Upcoming Events

### August

- ***Starting Out Wild: Water Everywhere! (ages 1-3)***
  - 10:00-11:00 a.m. | Friday, August 2 | Friedrich Wilderness Park classroom  
Learn the importance of water through stories, songs, and hands-on activities! These high energy, engaging programs are a perfect way to foster an appreciation of the natural world. Most classes take place outdoors. RSVP required.
- ***Fitness Hike (recommended ages: 12 & up)***
  - 8:00 a.m.-10:00 a.m. | Saturday, August 3 | Friedrich Wilderness Park  
Enjoy a guided fitness hike along Friedrich's most scenic trails, including Vista Loop, Main Loop, and Water Trail while learning about the park's diverse ecosystem. This hike will cover nearly 3 miles of natural surface trails with elevation changes. RSVP required.
- ***Growing Up Wild: Frogs (ages 4-7)***
  - 10:00 a.m.-11:30 a.m. | Wednesday, August 7 & 21 | Friedrich Wilderness Park classroom  
Learn about frogs and their habitat through stories, hands-on activities, and a guided hike. Growing Up Wild builds on a child's sense of wonder about nature and invites them to explore wildlife and the world around them. Activities are designed to provide an early foundation and appreciation of nature. RSVP required.
- ***Drop In Days: Wildlife of Texas (all ages)***

10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. | Saturday, August 10 | Medina River Natural Area  
Drop in and visit with Southern Wildlife Rehab and learn about native wildlife, rescue, and rehabilitation. Families will also learn what to do when encountering wildlife. Participants will also have the opportunity to interact with USDA education ambassador animals including skunks, an opossum, turtles, tortoises, bats and more! Hands on activity included. No prior registration needed.

- **Bat Walk (all ages)**
  - 7:30 p.m.-9:00 p.m. | Saturday, August 24 | Elmendorf Lake Park  
It's International Bat night! Enjoy an interactive bat experience organized by San Antonio Natural Areas Parks and Recreation at the beautiful Elmendorf Lake Park. The event combines a bat walk with Park Naturalists, a craft activity, and live bats presented by Southern Wildlife Rehabilitation. Using an echo meter, families will identify bats by their call. In addition to bats, families may encounter other critters such as night hawks and bullfrogs! Meet near the restrooms off Buena Vista St. For more information email [casey.cowan@sanantonio.gov](mailto:casey.cowan@sanantonio.gov) , or call (210) 207-3785. No prior registration needed. FREE

## SEPTEMBER

- **First Saturday Hike: KIDS ALIVE! Survival Class (recommended: ages 6-13)**
  - 9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m. | Saturday, September 7 | Friedrich Wilderness Park  
Learn important survival skills, including what to do when lost on a trail, how to prepare for a hike, and awareness of safety hazards. Instructor: Joey Rios. Suggested donation: \$3 per person, or \$6 per family. For more information, call 210-207-3782 or email

All programs (unless otherwise noted): RSVP required. Visit [fosana.org](http://fosana.org) to reserve your spot. Suggested donation: \$3 per person, \$6 per family. For more information, call 210-207-3782 or email [nicole.mcleod@sanantonio.gov](mailto:nicole.mcleod@sanantonio.gov).

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### Are you connected to San Antonio Natural Areas on social media?

You can like us on [Facebook](#).

Find us on [Instagram](#) @sanaturalareas.

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We're excited to announce that we recently joined with memberplanet to help manage our FoSANA memberships. We're looking forward to offering you a better hands-on system for overseeing your membership. It will allow us to keep track of members and membership renewal dates, allowing us to focus more on promoting the stewardship of our precious San Antonio natural resources. We're letting you know about this change now because you'll receive an email asking you to join memberplanet in the coming days. All you need to register is your name and email address. If you want to renew your membership, then you'll also need a credit card to quickly and easily register.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us at [friendsofsanaturalareas@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofsanaturalareas@gmail.com). Of course, you're always welcome to renew your membership with a check made out to "Friends of San Antonio Natural Areas" and send to:  
Friends of San Antonio Natural Areas  
San Antonio, Texas 78256  
21395 Milsa Drive

Sincerely,  
FoSANA Board

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## Membership Update

**Are you a member of Friends of San Antonio Natural Areas (FoSANA)?**

Please support FoSANA on the preservation and educational outreach of natural areas around San Antonio by joining or renewing your membership [online](#) today.

Your membership this year will help us continue to

- offer over 400 environmental programs for families and adults at the Natural Areas.
- serve over 14,000 families and adults through education and outreach programs.
- coordinate over 400 volunteer programs and 7,500 volunteer hours supported trail maintenance, habitat conservation and restoration, and native landscapes and gardens.

Plus, when you renew your membership, you'll receive our monthly newsletter that provides updates on natural areas happenings and timely information on upcoming events.

Should you need any assistance or have any questions or comments about your membership, please feel free to email us at [friendsofsanaturalareas@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofsanaturalareas@gmail.com).

Sincerely,  
FoSANA Board

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**Friends of San Antonio Natural Areas is dedicated to promoting stewardship of San Antonio's Natural Areas, and to the understanding and appreciation of nature through educational and scientific programs.**

For the latest updates and more activities, please see the calendar on the FOSANA website.

**[Friends of San Antonio Natural Areas Website](#)**

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